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ABSTRACT

In this paper, English teachers are urged to assist slow learners to discover their hidden potential. The paper deals with a wide range of topics, including the importance of early language arts experiences; ideas for developing a love of literature in all students; the value of having high expectations for all students; techniques for developing writing ability in students at all levels; resources published by the National Council of Teachers of English that are useful in helping teachers recognize and release student potential; implications of the severe economic deprivation that exists among millions of families in the United States; the dangers of overemphasizing standardized tests that place students under a great deal of pressure; the desirability of humanistic education; and ways in which teachers can work to see that the potential abilities of all students are recognized and released. (GW)

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WE WORK TOGETHER TO FIND POTENTIAL

Charlotte Brooks

I WANT TO BEGIN AND END THIS TALK WITH A STATEMENT WRITTEN BY A TEACHER OF ENGLISH AND ACCEPTED BY TEACHERS OF ENGLISH. I ENDORSE THE STATEMENT, AND HOPE YOU WILL.

AS A TEACHER OF ENGLISH I FIRMLY AVOW THAT WHOEVER HAS BEEN ADMITTED TO MY CLASS IS A PERSON WHO POSSESSES POTENTIAL. IT IS MY PROFESSIONAL DUTY--MY JOB--TO ASSIST THAT STUDENT--TO ASSIST ALL MY STUDENTS--TO DISCOVER AND DEVELOP THAT POTENTIAL.

ROBERT FROST SPOKE AS CLEARLY AS ANYONE COULD ABOUT CHOICES IN "THE ROAD NOT TAKEN." THE POET TALKED ABOUT A TRAVELER WHO LOOKED DOWN ONE OF TWO DIVERGING ROADS IN A YELLOW WOOD, UNABLE TO TRAVEL BOTH. AFTER LOOKING DOWN THAT ONE AS FAR AS HE COULD, THE TRAVELER TOOK THE OTHER. THESE ARE FROST'S WORDS:

TWO ROADS DIVERGED IN A WOOD, AND I --
I TOOK THE ONE LESS TRAVELED BY,
AND THAT HAS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

FOR THE TEACHER OF ENGLISH, THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED BY IS THE ONE THAT LEADS TO INTEREST IN THE POOR LEARNERS. THE ONES WITH POTENTIAL SO HIDDEN THAT SUCH STUDENTS SEEM TO BE TERRIBLY ALIENATED, INDIFFERENT TO LEARNING, SLOW OR INCAPABLE OF LEARNING AS MUCH AS OTHER STUDENTS.

THE JOURNEY BEGAN A LONG TIME AGO, IN THE EARLY 1960'S WHEN TEACHERS OR THOSE WHO ASSIGNED TEACHERS WERE FORCED BY THE TENSIONS OF THE TIME TO MAKE CHOICES. TEACHERS HAD TO DECIDE WHETHER THEY

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WOULD TAKE THE EASIER ROAD OF CONFORMITY WITH CUSTOM, OF WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO WERE ALREADY WELL ON THEIR WAY TO SUCCESSFUL LIVES, OR WHETHER THEY WOULD PREPARE THEMSELVES TO WORK WITH THE OTHERS, THEN CALLED THE DISADVANTAGED AND THE DEPRIVED: NOW SOMETIMES CALLED THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT. I WANT TO TALK ABOUT THOSE WHO CHOSE THAT ROAD LESS TRAVELED. NOW, AFTER YEARS OF COMMITMENT, SOME OF THESE TEACHERS HAVE STOPPED TO LOOK BACK AND TO SEE WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN, WHERE THEY ARE, AND WHERE THEY ARE GOING. o WHERE WERE WE?

BEFORE I MOVE INTO THE PAST -- INTO THAT PERIOD PRECEDING MY YEAR AS NCTE'S PRESIDENT, I WANT TO TALK ABOUT MY JOURNEY. IT MIGHT BE RISKY, BUT I'M GOING TO TAKE THAT RISK AND I'M GOING TO CONTINUE TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT THE HARD TRAVELING SOME TEACHERS OF ENGLISH HAVE DONE SINCE THE 1960'S, ABOUT SOME OF THE HAPPENINGS ON THIS YEAR'S JOURNEY AND ABOUT SOME POSSIBLE WAYS TO GO IN THE FUTURE FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH.

JOURNEYS, YOU KNOW, REQUIRE SOME "HAPPENINGS" BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER. AND EVEN DURING.

EVERY TRAVELER IS GOING SOMEWHERE - TO ITHACA OR TO CANTERBURY OR TO A LESS REAL PLACE, LIKE SUCCESS IN A PROFESSION OR A HAPPY HOME OR TO A COMFORTABLE PLACE IN SOCIETY. THE USUAL GOAL OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER IS THAT PLACE WHERE SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS ARE. SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS VALUE AND USE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EASILY AND WELL, ENJOY LITERATURE, AND MAKE THEIR TEACHERS GLAD ABOUT THE TIME SPENT TEACHING THEM.

BEGINNINGS ARE VERY IMPORTANT. YOUNG CHILDREN SHOULD COME TO SCHOOL WELL-NOURISHED, PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY AND EAGER TO LEARN WHAT SCHOOLS HAVE TO OFFER THEM, AND TEACHERS SHOULD BE ABLE AND WILLING TO ACCEPT THEM AS THEY ARE, WITH ALL OF THE WONDERFUL POTENTIAL USUALLY PRESENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN EVERYWHERE.

OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS I HAVE MET MANY LEARNERS AND MANY TEACHERS. THE BEST WAY, I THINK TO EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF BEGINNING LANGUAGE ARTS IS THROUGH SOME LITTLE STORIES. I HAVE TOLD THESE ANECDOTES TO OTHER AUDIENCES, BUT THEY ILLUSTRATE SO WELL WHAT I WANT TO SAY THAT I'LL TELL THEM AGAIN.

IN FLORIDA, A TEACHER HAD BEEN ACCUSTOMED TO TEACHING HER FIRST GRADERS THE SOUNDS OF LANGUAGE BY HAVING THEM RESPOND TO THE SOUNDS ANIMALS MAKE. FOR "S" SHE USED THE SENTENCE "SAMMY THE SNAKE SAYS 'sss'" THE STUDENT BODY CHANGED FROM WHITE MIDDLE CLASS TO LATINO AND BLACK CHILDREN OF MIGRANT WORKERS. SHE STILL USED THE SAME SENTENCE AND ONE DAY ASKED HER CLASS TO SAY IT: THEN REPEAT IT TO THEIR NEIGHBORS. THE TEACHER WAS ALARMED -- TO SAY THE LEAST -- WHEN HER YOUNG PUPILS RAISED SHIRTS AND SKIRTS AND LOOKED DOWN, SAYING THE SENTENCE. BUT SHE WAS A WISE TEACHER. SHE WENT TO A NEARBY ROOM AND DESCRIBED THE INCIDENT. HER KNOWLEDGEABLE NEIGHBOR SAID SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

> "HONEY, DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE 'S' SOUND. YOUR KIDS HAVE MORE TROUBLE WITH 'B' and 'V' NOW. THEY CONFUSE THOSE TWO SOUNDS AND THOUGHT YOU WANTED THEM TO SAY THE SENTENCE TO THEIR NAVELS."

TEACHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN MUST UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT AND MUST APPLY THAT KNOWLEDGE SO THAT LEARNERS CAN GROW AND LEARN IN THE HEADY ATMOSPHERE OF TOTAL ACCEPTANCE OF SELF AND LANGUAGE; TOTAL EXPECTATION THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO LEARN.

A YOUNG TEACHER IN MISSISSIPPI, WITH A GROUP OF OTHERS, PUBLISHED THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE STORIES TOLD TO HER BY YOUNG CHILDREN IN A HEAD START PROGRAM IN THAT STATE. ONE SUCH STORY, POND, BY A FOUR YEAR OLD, HAS IN IT AT LEAST ONE SENTENCE REFLECTING THE RICH LANGUAGE OF YOUNG CHILDREN AND REFUTING THE IDEA THAT POOR CHILDREN ARE NECESSARILY LANGUAGE DEPRIVED. HERE IT IS.

"A CATFISH HAS A MOUTH LIKE A BIG SMILE."

IN A BRIEF PREFACE TO THIS CHILD'S BOOK, THE TEACHER WROTE,

"THE LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT OF MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN IS BEAUTIFUL . ..."

THE CHILD SPOKE AND THE TEACHER WROTE IN THE 1960'S AND OF COURSE MANY TEACHERS BOTH BEFORE AND SINCE HAVE USED THIS APPROACH. NCTE PUBLICATIONS REFLECT IT AND TEXTBOOKS DO ALSO. BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE QUESTION ABOUT CATFISH ON STANDARDIZED TESTS. IN FACT, I HAVEN'T SEEN MANY CONCEPTS ON THE TESTS FROM THE LIVES OF KIDS FROM THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA, FROM THE ALASKAN TUNDRA OR FROM BIG CITY TURF.

DEVELOPMENTS AFTER BEGINNINGS ARE IMPORTANT ALSO. GOOD TEACHERS CAN CONNECT AN APPRECIATION OF LANGUAGE WITH A LOVE FOR LITERATURE. LITERATURE IS USUALLY ENJOYED FROM THE START BY THE MOST SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS. YOUNG CHILDREN RESPOND QUITE NATURALLY TO LITERATURE, AND THAT RESPONSE HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH THEIR SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC STATUS. GOOD TEACHERS KNOW THIS, AND OFTEN DISCOVER STUDENTS' HIDDEN STRENGTHS WITH LITERATURE. HERE ARE A FEW OF THEIR WAYS OF DOING THIS.

A MASTER TEACHER IN NEBRASKA, USING THE CONCEPT "FLIGHT," SHARED WITH STUDENTS MYTHS, FOLKTALES, POETRY, HISTORY, BIOGRAPHY AND CONTEMPORARY FLIGHT STORIES. THE MYTH OF DAEDALUS AND ICARUS, THE WINGED INVENTIONS OF LEONARDO DAVINCI, THE NATIVE AMERICAN RAVEN AND OTHER TALES WERE INCLUDED.

IN NEW JERSEY, A TEACHER ASKED A CLASS TO DISCUSS ROETHKE'S "MY PAPA'S WALTZ.: THE STUDENTS, WHO HAD FAILED ENGLISH, WERE IN A SPECIAL SUMMER PROGRAM. TOGETHER THEY READ THE POEM, LINE BY LINE, AND -- ALTHOUGH THEY HAD BEEN CALLED POOR READERS -- THEY DEMONSTRATED A COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THE POET SAID AND MEANT.

LATER, IN WASHINGTON, D.C., ANOTHER TEACHER USED LANGSTON HUGHES' "I, TOO, SING AMERICA" IN MUCH THE SAME WAY, AND ELICITED A RESPONSE THAT MADE CLEAR THE STUDENTS' POTENTIAL FOR READING AND UNDERSTANDING AND LOVING LITERATURE.

A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER IN ALASKA HAS READ WORK BY AND ABOUT HELEN

KELLER WITH STUDENTS WHO HAVE FULLY UNDERSTOOD HOW THE BLIND, DEAF AND SPEECHLESS GIRL, IMPRISONED IN HER OWN BODY, WAS RELEASED BY A TEACHER WHO LOVED AND CARED, AND WORKED HARD TO DISCOVER THAT HIDDEN POTENTIAL.

HELEN KELLER'S TEACHER, SPELLING "WATER" INTO THE HAND OF HER STUDENT AND POURING WATER FOR HER TO FEEL AT THE SAME TIME, REPRESENTS THE KIND OF SENSITIVE, UNDERSTANDING TEACHER WHO CAN FIND BRILLIANCE IN STUDENTS OFTEN CALLED HOPELESS.

RECENTLY, IN A PEOPLE TO PEOPLE VISIT TO FIVE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, I TALKED WITH EDUCATORS IN UNIVERSITIES AND IN SCHOOLS AND LEARNED ABOUT THE HIGH LEVEL OF EXPECTATION THEY HAVE FOR THEIR STUDENTS. I BELIEVE, LIKE THEM, THAT MUCH CAN BE DONE WHEN MUCH IS EXPECTED, AND I THINK THAT IF LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN FOREIGN LANDS CAN SPEAK, READ AND WRITE ENGLISH WELL, AND CAN ENJOY PETER RABBIT, SCIENCE FICTION, MYSTERY STORIES, -- AND SHAKESPEARE - IN ENGLISH ALL AMERICAN STUDENTS CAN DO SO.

I'VE SEEN A RENEWAL OF INTEREST IN THIS COUNTRY RECENTLY IN THE WRITING PROCESS. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THE WRITING HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT TO TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, BUT THAT SUDDENLY OTHER PEOPLE HAVE DISCOVERED THAT STUDENTS ARE NOT WRITING AS WELL AS THEY CAN. MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER MEDIA HAVE FEATURED THE WRITING CRISIS, AND THE PUBLIC HAS REACTED TO THESE AND TO REPORTS ABOUT THE POOR WRITING OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, TO RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF WRITING, AND TO OTHER RUMBLINGS OF DISCONTENT ABOUT

WRITING. WRITING, TOO CAN REVEAL POTENTIAL, BUT ONLY WHEN STUDENTS REALLY WRITE. WRITING TESTS THAT ARE IN EFFECT EDITING TESTS WON'T DO.

STUDENTS CAN DICTATE THEIR COMPOSITIONS. GREAT WRITERS HAVE DONE THIS AND NOBODY HAS DENIED THEIR RIGHT TO DO SO -- NOR HAS ANYONE SAID IT WASN'T THEIR WRITING JUST BECAUSE SOMEBODY ELSE ACTUALLY PUT IT DOWN. VOLTAIRE, I UNDERSTAND, WAS ONE OF MANY WRITERS WHO DICTATED HIS WRITINGS TO A SECRETARY.

A YOUNG BOY, OTIS BENNETT, ONCE DICTATED A BOOK, REMARKABLE FOR ITS WARM, VIVID LANGUAGE. AT ONE POINT HE SAID --

"LONELY FEELS LIKE SITTING IN A DARK ROOM ALL BY YOURSELF."

HE ALSO SAID:

"I LIKE THE FALL NOW AND ON A WARM DAY I CAN HEAR THE BIRDS. THEY BE ON MY FIRE ESCAPE. I GETS UP AND OPEN THE WINDOW AND THEY FLY UP TO ME RIGHT ON THE SIXTH FLOOR AND THEY STARTS SINGING. AND I JUST LOOK AT THEM MAKING BIRD MUSIC.

IT'S WINGS THAT MAKE BIRDS FLY."

OTIS CLEARLY HAD THE ABILITY TO USE LANGUAGE WELL. BUT I REMEMBER AN ITEM ON A STANDARDIZED TEST -- AN ITEM ABOUT BIRDS. WHAT WOULD OTIS HAVE DONE WITH THIS?

"THE BIRDS WERE _____ IN THE TREES."

STUDENTS WERE ASKED TO SELECT ONE OF FOUR WORDS FOR THE BLANK. I DON'T REMEMBER ALL OF THEM, BUT TWO WERE "TWITTERING" AND "BANTERING." THE FIRST WAS THE CORRECT ANSWER, BUT I WONDER IF OTIS KNEW EITHER. I DON'T THINK OTIS WOULD HAVE DONE WELL ON ANY TEST NOT DESIGNED TO ELICIT RESPONSES FROM HIM ON THE BASIS OF HIS CONCEPTS, HIS LANGUAGE OR HIS LIFE. FOR OTIS AND FOR OTHERS LIKE HIM, DICTATING A STORY IS BETTER.

STUDENTS AT ALL LEVELS CAN DISCOVER WHAT THEY WANT TO SAY WHEN THEY WRITE ABOUT THEMSELVES AND OTHERS AND WHEN THEY DO SOME OF THE COMPOSING SUGGESTED BY THOSE PEOPLE WHO CAN REALLY TEACH THEM HOW TO WRITE. I WANT TO FOCUS HERE, BRIEFLY, ON WRITING IN COLLEGE, SINCE I'VE ALREADY STRESSED LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS; LITERATURE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

STUDENTS AT ALL LEVELS ENJOY PUBLISHING THEIR WORK, AND I HAVE SEEN STUDENTS DISCOVER THEIR OWN POTENTIAL FOR PUBLICATION. MOST RECENTLY, <u>PROUD VOICES</u> HAS BEEN PUBLISHED BY STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY STUDIES DEPARTMENT AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY. HERE, STUDENTS, ALL OF WHOM WERE IN THE FIRST OR SECOND YEAR OF COLLEGE LAST YEAR WROTE, EDITED AND PUBLISHED THE BOOK. STUDENTS IN OTHER PLACES TOO ARE FINDING THEMSELVES, THEIR VOICES AND THEIR POTENITAL AS THEY WRITE AND PUBLISH THEIR OWN WORKS.

I'LL LEAVE THIS CONSIDERATION OF WRITING WITH THE WORDS OF ELISABETH MCPHERSON, A TEACHER OF ENGLISH:

HONEST WRITING IS HARD WORK. AND STUDENTS OF ANY AGE WILL ENDURE THE STRUGGLE OF PUTTING THEIR SELVES AND THEIR LIVES INTO WORDS ONLY FOR TEACHERS WHO RESPECT BOTH THE STRUGGLE AND THE RESULT. STUDENTS WILL WRITE HONESTLY -- AND EFFECTIVELY -- ONLY FOR TEACHERS WHO READ WITH SYMPATHY.

IN MY VIEW, SUCH HONEST WRITING HELPS STUDENTS TO DISCOVER THEMSELVES AND THEIR POTENTIAL; TEACHERS WHO READ WITH SYMPATHY RELEASE POTENTIAL.

ADULT EDUCATION IS AN IMPORTANT LEVEL NOW. OUR NOVEMBER COUNCIL-GRAMS SPEAKS ABOUT THIS AND ANNOUNCES THAT ADULT EDUCATION HAS TREMENDOUS POSSIBILITIES FOR THE PROVISION OF OPPORTUNITY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING FOR ALL CITIZENS.

RECENT RESEARCH IN READING HAS INDICATED THAT EARLY READERS ARE NATURAL READERS WHO LEARN TO READ ON THEIR OWN THE WAY THEY LEARN LANGUAGE. USUALLY THEY READ BECAUSE THEY SEE THEIR PARENTS AND OTHERS READING, AND LOVING IT, AT HOME. IF OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULT EDUCATION CAN GET PARENTS READING INSTEAD OF WATCHING TELEVISION MORE YOUNG ONES WILL BECOME NATURAL READERS, I THINK.

oWHERE ARE WE GOING?

WHEN I SELECTED "WORKING TOGETHER" AS THE NCTE THEME FOR THIS YEAR I WANTED ESPECIALLY TO HAVE ALL COUNCIL COMPONENTS WORK TOGETHER TO RECOGNIZE AND RELEASE THE POTENTIAL OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE

BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL. I SAID, IN LAST YEAR'S BANQUET REMARKS:

"IN 1977, I'D LIKE THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO GATHER TOGETHER ALL OF ITS RESOURCES, INVESTIGATE ALL OF ITS STRENGTHS AND USE ALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS WITHIN IT. . . TC SEE THAT ALL STUDENTS LEARN TO USE AND ENJOY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ITS LITERATURE."

SO I BEGAN THIS JOURNEY LAST NOVEMBER WITH AN END IN VIEW, AND A NUMBER OF THINGS HAVE HAPPENED, NOT ENTIRELY BECAUSE I WANTED THEM TO OR EVEN DID ANYTHING TO MAKE THEM HAPPEN, BUT THEY ALL HELP TO ADVANCE THE YEAR'S THEME. MY PUBLISHED ANNUAL REPORT LISTS MANY OF THESE THINGS BUT I'LL JUST CITE ONE OF THEM HERE, BRIEFLY.

IN JANUARY, I MET WITH THE PRESIDENT-ELECT, VICE PRESIDENT AND THE TWO PAST PRESIDENTS TO DISCUSS A "WORKING TOGETHER" PRECONVENTION CONFERENCE FOR THIS CONVENTION. THE CONFERENCE FOCUS WAS RECOGNIZING AND RELEASING POTENTIAL IN THOSE STUDENTS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ENGLISH CLASSES. THE CONFERENCE WAS HELD MONDAY, AND NCTE PUBLICATIONS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, WERE DISCUSSED.

OUR PUBLICATIONS HAVE ALWAYS PLAYED VERY IMPORTANT ROLES AS SERVICES TO PERSONS BOTH IN AND OUT OF OUR PROFESSION. LET ME JUST NUDGE YOUR MEMORIES A BIT BY MENTIONING A FEW NCTE PUBLICATIONS, USEFUL TO TEACHERS ON ALL LEVELS FOR THE RECOGNITION AND RELEASE OF STUDENT POTENTIAL.

AMONG POLICY STATEMENTS ARE STUDENTS' RIGHT TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE, WHICH EXAMINES SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE AND DIALECT AND SUGGESTS SOUNDER, ALTERNATE APPROACHES, AND THE STUDENTS' RIGHT TO READ, AN OFFICIAL NCTE STATEMENT ON CENSORSHIP IN THE SCHOOLS, WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL COMMITTEES TO SET UP PROCEDURES FOR SELECTING BOOKS AND REVIEWING COMPLAINTS AGAINST BOOKS.

NCTE'S TASK FORCE ON RACISM AND BIAS DEVELOPED CRITERIA FOR TEACHING MATERIALS IN READING AND LITERATURE, A STATEMENT ON THE NATURE AND FREQUENCY OF RACISM IN ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS. ADDITIONALLY, THERE ARE GUIDELINES ON WOMEN'S ROLES, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS, POLICY ON GRADING, AND WORKLOAD STATEMENTS FOR TEACHERS AT ALL LEVELS.

THE BOOKS CITING CLASSROOM IDEAS, PREPARED BY THE COMMITTEE ON CLASSROOM PRACTICES, CAN HELP THE TEACHERS WHO REALLY WISH TO IDENTIFY AND TO HELP THE POTENTIALLY SUCCESSFUL STUDENT. THE 1969-70 VOLUME, MINORITIES: COMMUNICATING THE DREAMS' RESPONSIBILITY, LISTS PROVEN METHODS USED BY TEACHERS INCLUDING JOURNAL WRITING, DRAMA AS PARTICIPATION AND WRITING SHORT VERSE FORMS. ON RIGHTING WRITING, 1975-76 OFFERS WRITING PRACTICES THAT HAVE PRODUCED RESULTS. THE 1977-78 BOOK TEACHING THE BASICS - REALLY, HAS MANY SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING TEACHERS.

OUR PUBLICATIONS HAVE IN THE PAST, IT'S CLEAR, DEMONSTRATED THE PROFESSIONAL CONCERN OF NCTE MEMBERS FOR THE STUDENTS WITH HIDDEN

POTENTIAL. THIS CONCERN IS EVEN MORE STRONGLY SHOWN IN CURRENT WORKS.

STILL, EVERYTHING NOW IS NOT GOOD. MISTAKES HAVE BEEN MADE OUTSIDE OF THE PROFESSION. THESE THINGS AFFECT ENGLISH PROGRAMS AND A DIRECT LOOK AT SOME OF THEM MIGHT HELP US TO DEVELOP BETTER PERSPECTIVES ABOUT OUR OWN ACTIVITIES.

RECENTLY, THE FIRST PAGES OF NCTE'S COUNCIL-GRAMS WERE ABOUT THE RENEWED INTEREST IN WRITING FOUND IN SCHOOLS ACROSS THE NATION. THE NEXT FEW PAGES WERE ABOUT TESTS. AFTER THAT CAME SOME PAGES I'D LIKE TO SHARE -- AT LEAST PARTLY -- WITH YOU. UNDER THE HEADING "NATION'S CHILDREN IN TROUBLE," THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL GAVE THESE FRIGHTENING FACTS. . . . AMERICA'S CHILDREN ARE IN TROUBLE AND . . . THE TROUBLE IS GETTING WORSE. FIVE MILLION CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF SIX LIVE IN FAMILIES RECEIVING LESS THAN HALF OF THE MEDIAN INCOME (THE MEDIAN INCOME FOR A FAMILY OF FOUR IN 1974 WAS $14,327) AND THREE MILLION PRESCHOOL CHILDREN -- ONE OUT OF EVERY SIX LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LINE ($5,000 in 1974) . . . CHILDREN, 20,000,000 -- NEVER RECEIVE SUCH BASIC MEDICAL CARE AS COMPLETE IMMUNIZATION AND PROMPT TREATMENT FOR DISEASE.

WITHOUT OUTSIDE SUPPORT, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE PROBLEMS FACED BY FAMILIES AND CHILDREN WILL INCREASE IN SEVERITY AND THAT THE RATES OF CHILD ABUSE, CRIME, DRUG DEPENDENCY, FAILURE IN SCHOOL, AND OTHER INDICATORS OF OUR INATTENTION" WILL ALSO MOUNT."

DATA INDICATES THAT THE ASPIRATION LEVELS OF MINORITY STUDENTS ARE OFTEN HIGHER THAN THOSE OF OTHERS, BUT ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION, THE DEBILITATING CONSEQUENCES OF MANY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS, AND JOB DISCRIMINATION EVENTUALLY KILL THOSE ASPIRATIONS."

SOMETHING CAME THROUGH CLEARLY FROM THOSE ALARMING ARTICLES ABOUT THE COMMITMENT OF OUR COUNTRY TO ALL OF ITS PEOPLE. THERE ARE IMPLICATIONS THAT SCHOOLS CAN'T DO EVERYTHING; THAT SOME FAMILIES DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY FOR GOOD FOOD, ADEQUATE HOUSING AND HEALTH CARE. AND THESE FAMILIES OFTEN DON'T HAVE THE ENERGY OR THE POWER TO SEE TO IT THAT THEIR CHILDREN ARE WELL EDUCATED. THE CHILDREN THEN BECOME THE UNSUCCESSFUL STUDENTS I'VE TALKED ABOUT.

THE COMMITMENT TO SUCH STUDENTS IS WANING EVEN THOUGH WITH GOOD EDUCATION, PRESCHOOL THROUGH COLLEGE, MINORITY STUDENTS PROFIT MOST. SO WHERE PROVISION IS MADE, THE POTENTIAL OF SUCH NEGLECTED STUDENTS IN RECOGNIZED AND RELEASED. TEACHERS ARE REALLY TEACING, AND STUDENTS AT ALL LEVELS ARE REALLY LEARNING WHEREVER PROVISION IS MADE FOR SUCH TEACHING AND LEARNING.

THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY AND UNHOUSED, AND IN ILL HEALTH WILL NOT LEARN AS WELL AS OTHERS WHO ARE FED AND HOUSED AND HEALTHY. UNTIL THERE IS EQUALITY -- REAL EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL LEARNERS, THE REPORTS OF ASSESSMENTS AND TEST RESULTS IN THE MEDIA WILL SURELY CONTINUE TO MAKE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH FEEL GUILTY -- AND WE ARE <u>NOT</u> GUILTY.

THERE IS ANOTHER DARK SIDE. IT IS POSSIBLE TO GO TOO FAR IN TESTING STUDENTS. I AM SPEAKING HERE NOT ONLY OF THE FAILING STUDENTS ON THE LOWER RUNGS OF THE EDUCATIONAL LADDER BUT ALSO OF THE STUDENTS WHO APPEAR TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL.

A RECENT HEADLINE IN THE WASHINGTON POST SHOULD SERVE AS A WARNING TO US. CHILD SUICIDES INCREASE IN JAPAN; EXAMS BLAMED. I QUOTE FROM THE ARTICLE.

> TOKYO, NOVEMBER 6 - CHILD SUICIDES ARE ON THE INCREASE IN JAPAN... WHILE TEACHER PSYCHOLOGISTS AND POLICE BELIEVE MANY FACTORS ENTER INTO THE TRAGEDY OF A CHILD TAKING ITS OWN LIFE, THE MAIN BLAME IS PLACED ON JAPAN'S FIERCELY COMPETITIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM.
>
> LAST YEAR MORE THAN SEVEN HUNDRED CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE KILLED THEMSELVES ALTHOUGH THE NATIONAL POLICE AGENCY SAID PRECISE STATISTICS WERE NOT BEING KEPT. IN A PERIOD OF ONLY TEN DAYS RECENTLY, ELEVEN CHILDREN COMMITTED SUICIDE.
>
> IN JAPAN, THE ROAD TO WORLDLY SUCCESS IS TO AN OVERWHELMING DEGREE LINKED TO PASSING TOUGH ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS TO LEADING SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES.
>
> THIS ARTICLE REMINDS ME OF A STATEMENT I RECENTLY READ BY THE ANTHROPOLOGIST, ASHLEY MONTAGUE.

"THAT'S WHAT OUR CULTURE SEEMS TO BE ENGAGED IN - A CONSPIRACY AGAINST BEING HUMAN IN PUTTING DOWN ALL THOSE WONDERFUL PROMISING

TRAITS, THOSE CAPACITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT THAT CHILDREN ARE BORN WITH AND WHICH THEY ACHE, LITERALLY, TO TURN INTO ABILITIES. A CAPACITY IS A POTENTIALITY AND AN ABILITY IS A TRAINED CAPACITY. WE KILL THESE CAPACITIES BY THE WAY IN WHICH WE TEACH CHILDREN IN THE HOME OR IN SCHOOL. WE REQUIRE THEM TO FOLLOW RIGID RULES AND, IN SCHOOLS PARTICULARLY, WE CAUSE CHILDREN TO LEARN IN WAYS WHICH ARE THE VERY ANTITHESIS OF ACTUAL LEARNING. WE FORCE THEM TO REMEMBER AND REGURGITATE LARGE QUANTITIES OF ROTE-REMEMBERED FACTS FOR CERTAIN RITUALS THAT WE CALL "EXAMINATIONS."

IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT STUDENTS WON'T LEARN WELL IF THEY ARE POOR, ILL FED AND UNHEALTHY; THEY LEARN TOO WELL WHEN THEY ARE PUSHED TOO HARD. IN EITHER CASE, THEY DIE EARLY. AND THAT'S NOT WHAT WE WANT; THAT'S NOT WHAT OUR JOURNEY IS ABOUT.

oWHERE ARE WE GOING?

I'D LIKE TO MAKE A FEW FAIRLY CAUTIOUS GUESSES. I THINK WE'LL REFUSE TO BE MISLED BY ALL OF THE PRESSURES TO GO BACK TO THE BASICS, TO TEACH READING AS THOUGH IT WERE SOUNDING AND AS THOUGH MEANING HAD NOTHING AT ALL TO DO WITH IT; TO TEACH COMPOSITION AS THOUGH IT WERE EDITING.

JUST LAST WEEK, WHEN I WAS THINKING ABOUT THE ENDING FOR THIS TALK, AND WORKING ON IT TOO, I READ AN ARTICLE IN THIS NOVEMBER'S ENGLISH JOURNAL -- AN ARTICLE CALLED "HUMANIZING EDUCATION: THE POSSIBLE DREAM" BY CHARLES F. GREIVER. MUCH IN THAT ARTICLE REPRESENTS MY OWN

IDEAS ABOUT THE POTENTIAL IN ALL STUDENTS.

IN OUR CLASSROOMS, WE FREQUENTLY TEND TO SEE THE CHILDREN OF THE WORKING AND NON-WORKING POOR AS INSENSITIVE, ILLITERATE, INARTICULATE, LAZY AND CRUDE.

WE ENGLISH TEACHERS SOMETIMES AMUSE OURSELVES WITH FANTASIES ABOUT LEADING A POTENTIAL SHAKESPEARE OR DICKENS TO REALIZE HIS FULL POTENTIAL WHILE OUR CLASSROOMS FILL UP WITH A RAG-TAG MIXTURE. HERE THEY COME: ODYSSEUS, THE WIFE OF BATH, SANCHO PANZA, FALSTAFF, TOM JONES, MRS. GAMP, LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER, MOLLY BLOOM, LENA GROVE, PABLO AND PILAR. . .

WHEN WE SET ARBITRARY STANDARDS OR ALLOW THE STATE, OR THE TESTING AGENCY, OR THE OTHER POLICYMAKERS TO SET THEM FOR US, WE FOCUS OUR HEARTS AND MINDS NOT ON THE JOURNEY BUT ON THE DESTINATION, CHANCES ARE WE'LL NEVER GET THERE ANYWAY, AND THE LITTLE TRIP WE TAKE WO''T BE GOOD.

IF WE WISH TO MAKE A PILGRIMAGE TO CANTERBURY, LET'S GO SLOWLY LET'S TELL STORIES, AND PAUSE TO LOOK AT THE COUNTRYSIDE. SPECIAL KIDS, ALL OF THEM, THE PROUD AND THE PROFANE, CAN BE FUN TO TRAVEL WITH. IF WE ENCOURAGE THEM A BIT, PERHAPS THEY WILL LEAD US DOWN SOME STRANGE AND INTERESTING PATHS.

WE DON'T KNOW IF CHAUCER'S DIVERSIFIED GROUP EVER ARRIVED AT CANTERBURY. HOWEVER, WE'VE ALL ENJOYED THEIR TRIP BECAUSE WE LISTENED

TO THE BAWDY MILLER AND THE LUSTY WIFE OF BATH WITH THE SAME INTEREST AND RESPECT WE ACCORDED THE DAINTY PRIORESS AND THE COURTEOUS AND WISE OLD KNIGHT. WE DID NOT EXPECT THEM TO DISAPPOINT US, AND THEY DID NOT."

THERE'S LITTLE I CAN ADD TO THAT. THIS TEACHER EXPRESSES MY OWN THINKING SO WELL - EVEN USING MY JOURNEY METAPHOR -- WHICH I SELECTED IN SEPTEMBER, LONG BEFORE I READ THE ARTICLE IN NOVEMBER -- THAT I'LL JUST MOVE NOW TO SOME QUESTIONS AND PERHAPS A FEW ANSWERS.

oHOW CAN WE KNOW THAT POTENTIAL IS PRESENT?

WE CAN'T. WE CAN ONLY SAY THAT IT SHOULD BE. YOUNG CHILDREN SHOULD COME TO SCHOOL WELL NOURISHED, PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY AND EAGER TO LEARN WHAT SCHOOLS HAVE TO OFFER THEM. THEY WILL BE LIKE THAT ONLY IF THEIR MOTHERS WERE WELL NOURISHED IN PREGNANCY, IF THEY -- THE CHILDREN -- WERE WELL CARED FOR IN INFANCY, AND IF IN THEIR PRE-SCHOOL DAYS THEY HAD THE PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL NURTURING TO WHICH <u>ALL</u> CHILDREN ARE ENTITLED. POVERTY AND LACK OF CARE <u>CAN</u> DESTROY POTENTIAL.

THE TIME HAS COME TO SPEAK UP; TO SAY WHAT LEARNERS MUST HAVE BEFORE THEY COME TO US. WE MUST WORK TOGETHER WITHIN THE PROFESSION TO SAY THESE THINGS AND WE MUST WORK WITH OTHERS OUTSIDE WHO HAVE THE SAME CONCERNS.

oHOW CAN WE RECOGNIZE POTENTIAL?

WE CAN DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES TO THE STANDARDIZED TESTS NOW BEING USED AND WE CAN EXPLAIN WHY WE MUST DO THIS. THE TESTS WE USE MUST SEEK STRENGTHS; NOT WEAKNESSES. THEY MUST GIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MANY RIGHT ANSWERS.

WE CAN DEVELOP GOOD TEACHERS. GOOD TEACHERS, I THINK I HAVE DEMONSTRATED, CAN RECOGNIZE POTENTIAL THROUGH THEIR TEACHING. WE MUST INSIST UPON THE BEST POSSIBLE PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH. THE NCTE STANDING COMMITTEE ON TEACHER PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION PUBLISHED IN 1976 A STATEMENT ON THE PREPARATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AND THE LANGUAGE ARTS. THIS MUST BE DISSEMINATED NATIONALLY AND USED EFFECTIVELY IF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH ARE TO BE PREPARED TO RECOGNIZE THE POTENTIAL IN THEIR STUDENTS. THESE TEACHERS WILL SEEK AND EXPECT SUCCESS; NOT FAILURE.

WE CAN DEVELOP AND USE GOOD MATERIALS. THESE MATERIALS, WHETHER DEVELOPED WITHIN SCHOOLS OR SCHOOL SYSTEMS OR PREPARED BY PUBLISHERS, MUST BE DESIGNED TO GIVE STUDENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO PRODUCE THEIR OWN LANGUAGE, TO USE THEIR OWN CONCEPTS AND TO SHOW WHAT THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED. WITH THEM, ALL STUDENTS MUST BE GIVEN OPPORTUNITIES TO RESPOND IN OPEN WAYS TO READING SELECTIONS. AND THESE RESPONSES, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, SHOULD BE ACCEPTED AS ALL RIGHT.

oHOW CAN WE RELEASE POTENTIAL?

TEACHING MATERIALS ARE IMPORTANT, TOO. POTENTIAL CAN'T EASILY BE RECOGNIZED IF STUDENTS ARE CONFINED TO SHORT ANSWER DRILLS,

REPETITIVE AND BORING SETS OF LANGUAGE BOOKS OR POORLY WRITTEN AND CONDESCENDING LITTLE LITERATURE BOOKS. MATERIALS MUST BE BEAUTIFUL, MUST HAVE QUESTIONS DESIGNED TO ELICIT MANY RESPONSES, AND MUST PROVIDE FOR MANY DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES.

ALL STUDENTS NEED OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE IN ORAL DISCOURSE, TO LEARN TO GET MEANING FROM THE PRINTED PAGE: TO WRITE ABOUT PEOPLE AND EXPERIENCES AND FEELINGS. ALL STUDENTS SHOULD HEAR AND READ GOOD LITERATURE AND SHOULD HAVE MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO RESPOND TO SUCH LITERATURE ORALLY, IN WRITING, AND THROUGH DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION.

ON MONDAY THE PRECONVENTION CONFERENCE ON RECOGNIZING AND RELEASING POTENTIAL MET AND DISCUSSED WAYS FOR THE COUNCIL TO WORK TOGETHER TO HELP THOSE STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL IN LEARNING ENGLISH. ALTHOUGH WE MUST SPEND MORE TIME COMPLETING WORK ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS, I CAN SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF THE POSSIBILITIES.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ACCEPTED UNANIMOUSLY THE STATEMENT I READ TO YOU AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS TALK. I ASK YOU TO ACCEPT IT ALSO, AND TO WORK WITH YOUR OWN STUDENTS IN THE LIGHT OF THAT ACCEPTANCE.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HAS AUTHORIZED A TASK FORCE TO STUDY TESTING AND MINIMAL COMPETENCIES.

THE CONFERENCE RECOMMENDED ONE OR MORE PUBLICATIONS, TRADE OR PROFESSIONAL WORKS. PLANS HERE ARE NOT COMPLETE, BUT COUNCIL MEMBERS

WILL BE GIVEN DETAILS WHEN THESE ARE READY.

THE CONFERENCE MADE OTHER SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING AFFILIATES, COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES, CONFERENCES, ASSEMBLIES AND OTHER COUNCIL COMPONENTS. THESE GROUPS WILL STUDY THE SUGGESTIONS AND WILL ACT UPON THEM AS THEY SEE FIT.

THE CONFERENCE DID NOT END ON MONDAY AFTERNOON. IT'S WORK HAS JUST BEGUN.

BEFORE WE ASK ANY MORE QUESTIONS AND CERTAINLY BEFORE WE ACT UPON ANY RECOMMENDATIONS WE'LL TAKE TIME FOR A WORD OF CAUTION. WE DON'T WANT TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD BY THOSE WHO THINK THAT OUR INTEREST IN STUDENTS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL MEANS THAT:

- WE ARE NOT INTERESTED IN ALL STUDENTS
- WE WANT TO LOWER STANDARDS
- WE ADVOCATE CHAOS IN THE CLASSROOM

NOT AT ALL. WE MUST CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN AN INTEREST IN ALL STUDENTS FOR INDEED WE MUST LOOK AT THE REASONS WHY HIGH ACHIEVERS ARE SO SUCCESSFUL IF WE ARE TO HELP THE LESS FORTUNATE STUDENTS. WE MUST MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS FOR ALL STUDENTS SINCE WE KNOW THAT THE LEVEL OF EXPECTATION IS OFTEN ONE OF THE IMPORTANT DETERMINING FACTORS IN STUDENTS' SUCCESS. AND WE MUST INSIST UPON APPROPRIATE GOALS, GOOD PLANNING AND WORKABLE STRUCTURES FOR TEACHING IN CLASSROOMS. WE REQUIRE CURRICULAR MATERIALS AND TEXTBOOKS FOR ALL, BASED UPON WHAT

RESEARCH HAS DEMONSTRATED IS RIGHT, WITH SPECIAL MATERIALS AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES WHERE THEY ARE NEEDED FOR THOSE STUDENTS REQUIRING SPECIAL HELP. STUDENTS AND TEACHERS PEOPLE OUR CLASSROOMS. AND WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO ALL OF THEM.

WITH THE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, AND WITH THAT WORD OF CAUTION I COME TO THE END OF THIS TALK. MARGARET WALKER, IN "FOR MY PEOPLE" SPEAKS OF A STUDENT WHO WENT TO SCHOOL IN "CRAMPED, BEWILDERED YEARS" TO "LEARN TO KNOW THE REASONS WHY AND THE PLACES WHERE AND THE DAYS WHEN." SHE SPEAKS OF THE "BITTER HOURS" WHEN THE STUDENT DISCOVERED THAT "NOBODY CARED AND NOBODY WONDERED AND NOBODY UNDERSTOOD." MARTIN LUTHER KING, IN HIS "I HAVE A DREAM" SPEECH, SPOKE ABOUT THE NECESSITY FOR WORKING TOGETHER, AND ABOUT HIS HOPE THAT THE CHILDREN OF THIS LAND WOULD GO TO SCHOOL ONE DAY, HAND IN HAND, TO LEARN TOGETHER.

I BELIEVE, WITH HIM, THAT IF AMERICA IS TO BE A GREAT NATION, WE MUST WORK TOGETHER TO KEEP STUDENTS OF ALL AGES FROM HAVING TO ENDURE CRAMPED BEWILDERED YEARS AND BITTER HOURS. ALL STUDENTS MUST BE EDUCATED TO THEIR FULLEST POTENTIAL -- AT LEAST IN THOSE ASPECTS OF LEARNING IN WHICH WE CAN HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.

AND WE CAN SAY THIS:

AS A TEACHER OF ENGLISH I FIRMLY AVOW THAT WHOEVER HAS BEEN ADMITTED TO MY CLASS IS A PERSON WHO POSSESSES POTENTIAL. IT IS MY PROFESSIONAL DUTY -- MY JOB -- TO ASSIST THAT STUDENT -- TO ASSIST

ALL MY STUDENTS -- TO DISCOVER AND DEVELOP THAT POTENTIAL.

AND THAT WILL MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.